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ABSTRACT

The mini school program is designed to provide a smooth transition from the elementary school to the independent discipline approach of high school. Under the program, a student spends two-thirds of each school day in a mini school where he is taught language arts, math, health science, and social studies. Each mini school has a teacher for each of the four subject areas. During the four class periods that students are in the mini school, teachers work with them in any way teachers choose. This report describes how the mini schools operate, tells how to schedule mini schools, and outlines some of the advantages of mini schools over more traditional methods of schooling. (JF)

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MINI SCHOOLS

McMURRAY JUNIOR HIGH

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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PRINCIPAL

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INTRODUCTION

The mini school program began at McMurray the 1969-70 school year. We were searching for a better way of working with our incoming students. We felt that seventh graders deserved the best start into junior high we could give them. After much thought and discussion the mini school idea was developed and adopted. Each year we have attempted to evaluate and improve this program.

Having completed three years of the mini school program with seventh grade students, those of us working in the program are convinced it is a program of merit. Our building facilities, teaching staff, elective program and overall school organization led us to believe this kind of program would help provide a better teaching and learning situation for our seventh graders. With this type of organization we have found many more advantages and greater satisfaction among teachers, parents and students.

ORGANIZATION

Our seventh grade students are divided into three groups to form three separate mini schools. The number of students each year will range from three to four hundred. The elective program is established with the students assigned to physical education, art, vocal music and exploratory experiences on alternate days. Band and orchestra are also offered. If a student wishes to take one of these he will not take vocal music or art. These electives take one third of each student's day. The remaining two thirds of each school day the student is in the mini school where he is taught language arts, math, health-science and social studies.

Each mini school is assigned a staff of four teachers: a language arts, math, health-science and social studies teacher. A team leader is chosen to help co-ordinate efforts within the mini school and among the three mini schools as well as with the rest of the school. These four teachers have a common planning period and can plan together daily if needed. During the four class periods the students are in the mini school, the teachers may work with them in any way they choose. It will vary from day to day. The teachers will also vary the size of the group depending on the activities and instructional goals they have in mind. Students and teachers enjoy the flexibility and variety possible with this set-up.

OBJECTIVES

To provide a much smoother transition from the elementary school to the independent discipline approach of high school. To provide a student with a "home base", a place to belong, in a large secondary school.

To provide a well coordinated curriculum. To provide a creative curriculum and adjust the schedule accordingly.

To stress ability grouping less, to provide more opportunities for students to work with others of varying abilities. To provide flexibility in movement of students from one ability grouping to another. To provide students with the opportunity to work in groups of varying sizes.

To provide enrichment and exploratory opportunities to enhance creativity, social growth and development of special interests and talents.

THE MINI SCHOOL LEADER

The following points state the roll the mini school leader should attempt to carry out.

1. To coordinate the team efforts in working to meet the objectives of the mini school.
2. To provide leadership in setting up guidelines for time, frequency and purpose of planning sessions, grouping students, scheduling, and other routine tasks.
3. Attempt to provide for balance and fairness in work assignments.
4. To provide a democratic atmosphere where all team members share in decision making. Give the team members a voice but be prepared to make the final decision as necessary.
5. Help provide opportunities for innovative teaching experiences to be explored by team members, either individually or in cooperation with one or more teachers within the mini school or across mini schools.
6. Guide team toward effective coordination of academic program and encourage coordination of teacher efforts in each discipline.
7. Work for good staff relations within the team, with other mini school faculties, and faculty members in general.
8. Serve as a communicator between administration and team concerning mini school operation. Team leaders, principals, and counselor will meet each Wednesday morning to evaluate progress, work out problems and make improvements in the overall program.

EXPLORATORY

In our attempt to enhance creativity, social growth and development of special interests and talents, we set up an every other day time block for exploratory experiences. During this period of instruction, each student will have thirty hours each of shop, personal development and a third experience of his own choosing.

The one he chooses to do develops from the use of the talents of the mini school faculty, the interests of the students and the instruction of Community Education staff members. These are small groups ranging in size from four to ten students. The exploratory courses this year are typing, drama, journalism, crafts, audio visual, tennis, slimnastics, educational games, needlework, foreign language, chess and guitar. These are introductory classes. Each student may work on his own particular level.

Since class size is small the teacher-student relationship is close, informal and most rewarding. Students and teachers have an opportunity to get to know one another and see each other in a new light. For example when the English teacher takes five students to the tennis court and plays tennis with them, this is great for both the students and teacher. When a student beats the social studies teacher in chess this also makes an interesting situation.

Parents sometimes share their talents by coming to help with the instruction.

A progress report to parents is sent home at regular grading time. The students may be given satisfactory, needs improvement or unsatisfactory marks. Parents also are given information about conduct, whether the student is bringing his materials and the interest level of the child.

ADVANTAGES

This type of organization offers a number of advantages. The mini schools provide a home base that satisfies a student's need to belong. Adjustment to his new school is easier.

Parent conferences can be conducted with all four academic teachers present. Conferences are not regularly scheduled in junior high as they are in elementary school, however when a conference is needed it can be easily arranged.

One further advantage is the closeness with which the team of four teachers works in providing a well-planned, well-coordinated curriculum for each group of students. Co-operative efforts among mini schools is also an advantage. Co-operative planning and teaching is possible among teachers of each discipline as well as cross discipline planning within each mini school.

Flexibility of scheduling aids student learning. Students don't always have the same subject first or last each day, nor are they in class with the same students all day. Most students enjoy the variety. Teachers can plan for special speakers or films for the entire mini school without disturbing the rest of the school. Opportunities to move students into faster or slower material are built into the schedule without altering anything except the individual student's section number. Opportunities for working with groups of various sizes can be easily arranged.

Each team plans number of groups, size of groups, length of periods and composition of groups. Scheduling is done within the mini-school. No bells ring during the school day.

Each teaching team has a common planning period. This is most helpful in scheduling, planning co-operative teaching and discussing ways of meeting individual student needs.

SCHEDULING

Scheduling students into classes in a mini school can be done in a variety of ways. Each mini school in our school establishes its goals and determines what type of schedule will fit the needs. You will note that we utilize a variety of schedules.

The first step is to determine how much grouping your team desires. Most of our mini schools have pulled out a basic section and an accelerated section. These may be worked with separately on occasion as needed or may be combined with other groups.

Step two is to determine how many base groups you would like. We use base groups of 6, 8, or 9. For example, if you have 135 students, you might establish eight groups of approximately 17 students.

Step three involves looking at your overall schedule in terms of your objectives and from there working out a schedule. You may even determine the number of class periods you desire. Also you may vary the length of class periods. This schedule may remain the same or be changed as the need arises. You will schedule for a purpose: for example, to show an hour and one-half film, give a unit test, provide small groups for science lab, etc. Having a basic schedule and varying from it as the need arises has been most satisfactory.

It seems wise to schedule for curriculum needs as opposed to working out a schedule, then fitting the curriculum to the schedule. We also note that one team member can't always have the schedule as he'd like, but can have his needs met part of the time. There are times when he will need to cooperate with another team member in order for him to meet his goals. Thus, we emphasize that <u>working together is an all important factor</u>.

Caution should be exercised in removing structure from the schedule in that the teacher must adequately prepare the students for change. As structure is removed students may tend to become more social, noise level may increase and poorer self-discipline may be experienced. This will not occur, however, if teachers are careful to maintain firm control with standards that are consistently high.

You will find a variety of schedules on the following pages. We are hopeful this will serve as an introduction for you to the opportunities mini school teachers have for utilization of time.

Period	ENGLISH	SOCIAL STUDIES	MATH	SCIENCE
1	COMMON PLANNING PERIOD			
2	1,2	6	4	3,5
3	3	5	1,2	4,6
4		EXPLORATORY		
5	4	1,3	5,6	2
6	5,6	2,4	3	1

PURPOSE: A basic schedule from which variations are made as needed. Notice that the English and math teachers see the basic and accelerated groups separately.

Number of Base Groups: 6

Basic Group: 3

Accelerated Group: 4

Number of Class Periods: 6

Period	ENGLISH	SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE	MATH
1	COMMON PLANNING PERIOD			
2	1,2	5,6	4	3
3		EXPLORATORY		
4	3	4	1,2	5,6
5	4	3	5,6	1,2
6	5,6	1,2	3	4
7		ASSEMBLY		

PURPOSE: An assembly is planned at the end of the school day. In order to meet all classes and share the time equally between class periods a new schedule is planned for one day only. Since no bells ring, teachers can change dismissal time by planning among the four of them on an appropriate time schedule.

Number of Base Groups: 6

Basic Group: 4

Accelerated Group: 3

Number of Class Periods: 7

Period	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES	ENGLISH	MATH
1	COMMON PLANNING PERIOD			
2	1,3,6,7	Phased Out	2,4	5,8
3	2,4,5,8	Phased Out	6,7	1,3
4		EXPLORATORY		
5	Phased Out	4,5,6,8	1,3	2,7
6	Phased Out	1,2,3,7	5,8	4,6

PURPOSE: The Science teacher knew she'd need to leave early to go to the Science Center to work on materials, however she didn't want to miss any of her classes. The social studies teacher had planned a film, therefore he could work with large groups as easily as with small groups. By working with the Science teacher he gained additional planning time.

Number of Base Groups: 8

Basic Group: 7

Accelerated Group: 2

Number of Class Periods: 6

Period	ENGLISH	SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE	MATH
1	COMMON PLANNING PERIOD			
2	3,4	1,2	7	(Test) 5,6,8
3	5,6	7	2,8	(Test) 1,3,4
4		EXPLORATORY		
5	1,2	5,6,8	3,4	7
6	7,8	3,4	1,5,6	2

PURPOSE: To allow the math teacher to test all average students in two class periods, then teach her small group of accelerated students and also her small group of basic students. The English teacher isn't changed, however, by working with the math teacher, the social studies and science teachers gain time to work with the basic students in a small group situation.

Number of Base Groups: 8

Basic Group: 7

Accelerated Group: 2

Number of Class Periods: 6

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Although much work has gone into the program there is still much to be done. There is never enough planning time. The mini school staff came a week last fall before being placed on the pay roll to organize their schools and make cooperative plans.

Teacher selection should be placed in the hands of the building principal since all teachers would not work well in this program. Teachers that are flexible, innovative and cooperative are best suited for the program.

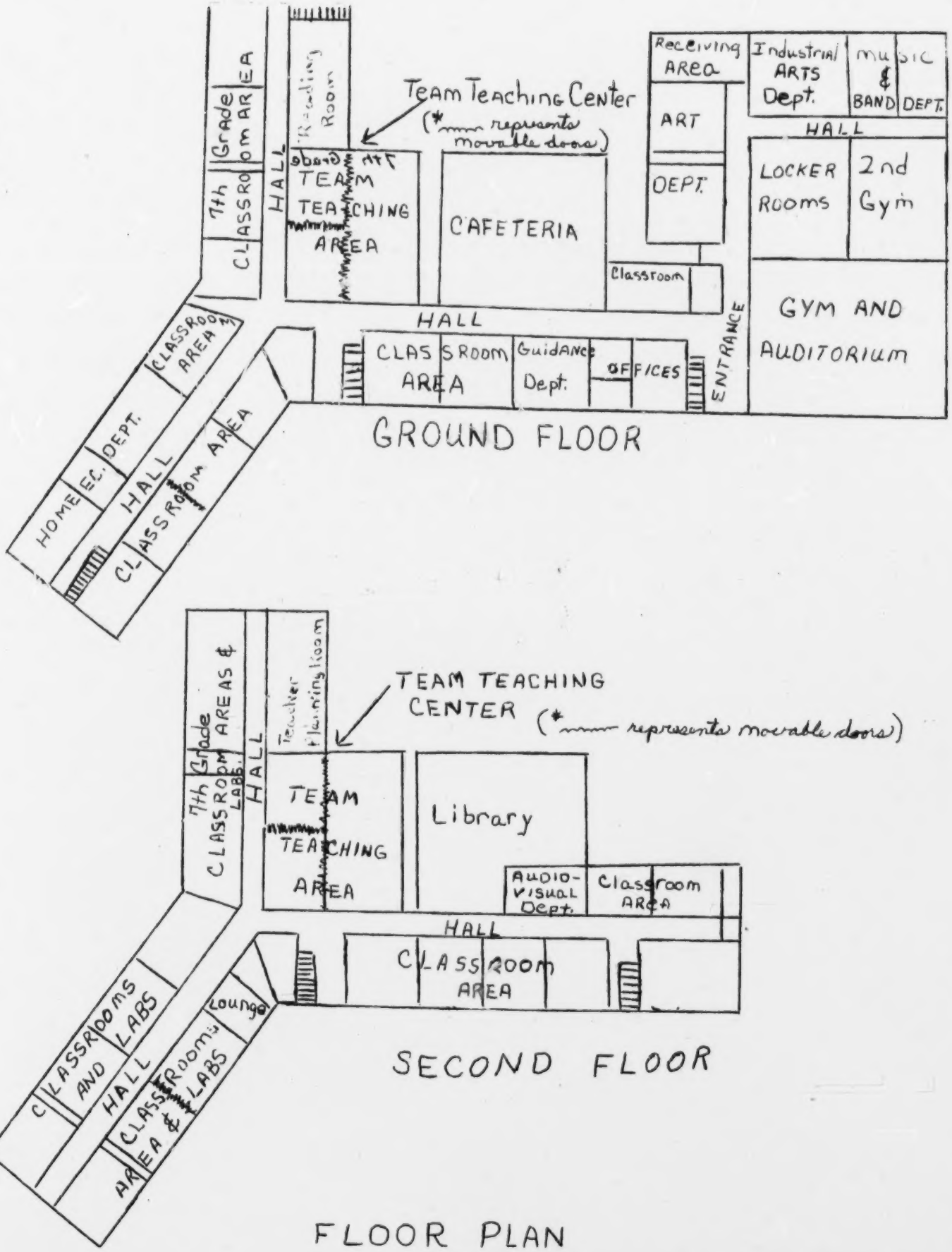
Teacher aids are needed for developing more individualized study materials. This would aid students in learning at their own rate of speed.

We would like to develop learning centers within the mini school areas. This takes time and materials, however it would aid teachers in the utilization of many sources of information.

Doing away with the present medal locker system and installing carpet would reduce the noise level. This would cause less noise when changing classes on the different time schedules now in use.

An additional teacher trained to work with students with learning problems would be an excellent addition to the program. Most teachers lack the necessary training and skills to help these students make adequate progress.

We are proud of our mini school organization and take pride in what we are able to accomplish. Each year we have made improvements. We hope to continue this organization and make greater strides in the future. Dedicated teachers are the key to the success of the program.


Team Teaching Center
(* represents movable doors)
Receiving Area
Industrial Arts Dept.
Music & Band Dept.
ART
DEPT.
HALL
LOCKER Rooms
2nd Gym
CAFETERIA
Classroom
HALL
GYM AND AUDITORIUM
CLASS ROOM AREA
Guidance Dept.
OFFICES
ENTRANCE
GROUND FLOOR
TEAM TEACHING CENTER
(* represents movable doors)
Teacher Planning Room
TEAM TEACHING AREA
Library
Audio-Visual Dept.
Classroom AREA
HALL
CLASS ROOM AREA
Lounge
SECOND FLOOR

FLOOR PLAN